

Medford, July 1845.

DEAR SIR:—

At a public meeting of Clergymen for the discussion of their duty in relation to Slavery, held at the Bulfinch Street Vestry, Boston, May 29th, 1845, it was

Resolved, That a Committee be appointed to draw up and circulate for signatures among the Ministers of the Unitarian Body, a Protest against the Institution of American Slavery as unchristian and inhuman, and to publish it when signed.

It was also resolved that the undersigned should be a Committee to draw up and circulate this Protest.

In accordance with these resolutions we have prepared and now transmit to you the accompanying Protest, respectfully requesting that you will, if it should be consistent with your views, give us permission to affix to it your name.

It is desirable that the names of those who intend to sign the Protest should be transmitted as soon as possible to the Rev. C. STETSON, Medford, Mass., without the charge of postage to the Committee, as they have not been provided with the means of defraying any expenses.

C. STETSON,
J. F. CLARKE,
S. G. BULFINCH,
O. STEARNS,

WM. H. CHANNING,
G. W. BRIGGS,
SAM'L J. MAY,
A. P. PEABODY,

J. PARKMAN,
WM. P. TILDEN,
S. MAY.

PROTEST

Against American Slavery by

Unitarian Ministers.

WE, the undersigned, disciples of Christ and Ministers of his Gospel, in bearing our solemn testimony against the system of American Slavery, deem it proper in the first place to declare the grounds of our action.

1. We owe it to three millions of Slaves, our fellow-men and brethren, to do what we can to undo their burdens by calm and earnest appeals to the reason and consciences of the Slaveholders. The wrongs of the Slave, however distant he may be, are our wrongs; for Jesus has taught us that every sufferer whom we can relieve is our neighbor, though a stranger, of another race and in a distant land.

2. We owe it to the Slaveholders, our fellow-men and brethren, whom we believe to be in a position hostile to the influences of Christianity, to speak a word of warning concerning the moral evil and inhumanity of the system with which they are connected.

3. We are the more obliged to bear this testimony because the Gospel of Christ cannot now be fully preached in the Slaveholding States. If it could, it might be less necessary to express our views in the present form. But violent and lawless men, as is well known, and as recent instances in our own experience show, have made it impossible for the Southern minister to declare the whole counsel of God by speaking freely of that particular sin with which the community he addresses is specially concerned. Consequently Southern men of better character, who would not, perhaps, themselves sanction such constraint, are nevertheless left without instruction as to their duty in relation to slavery. And if neither religion nor the instincts of humanity, nor the first principles of American liberty have taught them that the system is wrong, their ignorance may not be wholly their fault, but it would be ours were we to suffer it to remain. That they have been educated to believe that Slaveholding is right, may be a reason why we should not severely blame them, but it is also a reason why we should show them the truth; since the truth on this subject must come to them, if at all, from the free States, through books, writings, and public opinion.

4. These reasons would induce us to speak even if the North were doing nothing to uphold Slavery. But by our political, commercial and social relations with the South, by the long silence of Northern Christians and Churches, by the fact that Northern men, going to the South, often become Slaveholders and apologists for Slavery, we have given the Slaveholders reason to believe that it is only the accident of our position which prevents us from engaging in this system as fully as themselves. Our silence therefore is upholding Slavery, and we must speak against it in order not to speak in its support.

5. Especially do we feel that the denomination which takes for its motto "Liberty, Holiness and Love," should be foremost in opposing this system. More than others we have contended for three great principles,—individual liberty, perfect righteousness, and human brotherhood. All of these are grossly violated by the system of Slavery. We contend for mental freedom; shall we not denounce the system which fetters both mind and body? We have declared righteousness to be the essence of Christianity; shall we not oppose that system which is the sum of all wrong? We claim for all men the right of brotherhood before a universal Father; ought we not to testify against that which tramples so many of our brethren under foot?

MS. B. 1. 6 v. 1, p. 69

6. These reasons would lead us to speak individually and separately. But our combined voices may be heard more widely and be more regarded; and we therefore speak in company. As our principles forbid us to combine in subscribing creeds and fixing systems of theology, the more should we be ready to unite in practical endeavor to remove moral evils. As we do not claim to judge our brethren who are Slaveholders, to exclude them from Christian fellowship or communion, the more should we testify against the Slave system itself. Some individuals may hold Slaves for the sake of their bondmen, in order to give them their liberty under more favorable circumstances. We cannot regard such Slaveholders as we do those who hold their fellow beings as property for the sake of gain or personal convenience. Leaving to God to decide on the comparative guilt or innocence of individual Slaveholders, we pronounce the system unchristian and inhuman.

7. And more especially do we feel bound to lift up our voices at the present time, when the South has succeeded in compromising the nation to the support of Slavery; when it has been made a great national interest, defended in our national diplomacy, and to be upheld by our national arms; when the nation has, by a new measure, solemnly assumed the guilt and responsibility of its continuance; when free Northern citizens, without any alledged crime, are thrown into Southern prisons and sold to perpetual bondage; when our attempts to appeal respectfully to the Federal Courts are treated with contumely, so that the question is no longer whether Slavery shall continue in the Southern States, but whether Freedom shall continue in any of the States. Now, therefore, when our reliance on political measures has failed, it is the time to trust more fully in the power of Truth. To the schemes of party leaders, to political majorities, to the united treasures, arms, domains and interests of the nation, pledged to the extension and perpetuation of the system, let us now oppose the simple majesty and omnipotence of Truth. "For who knows not that Truth is strong,—next the Almighty?"

We, therefore, ministers of the Gospel of Truth and Love, in the name of God the universal Father, in the name of Christ the Redeemer, in the name of Humanity and Human Brotherhood, do solemnly protest against the system of Slavery, as unchristian and inhuman,—

Because it is the violation of the law of Right, being the sum of all unrighteousness which man can do to man, depriving him not only of his possessions but of himself. And, as in the possession of oneself are included all other possessions, and in the right to oneself are included all other rights, he who makes a man a slave commits the greatest possible robbery and the greatest possible wrong.

Because it violates the law of Love, which says, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."

Because it degrades man, the image of God, into a thing; changes persons into property; and, by violating the dignity of the human soul, is a constant sacrilege against that soul which the Scriptures declare to be the "Temple of the Holy Ghost."

Because it necessarily tends to pollute the soul of the Slave,—producing all vices and fostering habits of indolence, sensuality, falsehood, treachery, theft, moral stupor and perpetual childhood,—by taking away *Hope*, which God has appointed as the lightener of toil, the spur to exertion, and the seed of progress, and by destroying the sense of responsibility, which is the bond that connects the soul with God.

Because it tends to defile the soul of the master, as unlimited power must generally produce self-indulgence, licentiousness, cruelty, arrogance and a domineering spirit,—qualities utterly opposed to the humility, meekness and self-denial of Christ. We cheerfully admit that some, both of the Slaveholders and Slaves, have nobly resisted these influences and shown us virtues which we should be proud to imitate. But we know that the prevailing tendency of the system is nevertheless evil, and that it must always offer manifold temptations and inevitable occasions to sin.

Because this system, as the indispensable condition of its continuance, must restrict education, keep the Bible from the Slave, make life insecure in the hands of irresponsible power, deprive female innocence of protection, sanction adultery, tear children from parents and husbands from wives, violate the divine institution of families, and by hard and hopeless toil make existence a burden.

Because Slavery, as all history testifies, eats out the heart of nations, and tends every year more and more to sear the popular conscience and impair the virtue of the people. It neutralizes the influence which we ought to exert on the world as a nation whose mission it is to extend the principles of political freedom. It degrades our national character, making us appear before mankind as solemn hypocrites who declare "that *all* men are equal," and yet persist in holding a portion of them as Slaves,—who declare that "*all* are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and yet take these rights from a sixth-part of their own community. Constantly to profess one thing and constantly to practice another must destroy the sinews of national virtue.

In pure obedience to these principles which no circumstances can obscure and no time can change, we protest against any attempt to defend this system on the ground that the Slaves are often treated kindly. It is not a question of treatment, but of right; the greatest kindness would be no compensation for the rights which are withheld.

We protest against any attempt to defend the system from the letter of the Scriptures or from practices recorded in the Old Testament, as a libel on God and Christ, which would, if successful, disprove the Bible and make disobedience to it a duty. If this system was not prohibited among ancient nations by positive law, it was not for the reason that it was right,

but that, like polygamy and other evil practices, "it was suffered for a time because of the hardness of their hearts." And if, from the imperfect knowledge under the old dispensation, "the time of this ignorance God winked at," yet now in the light of the Gospel, "he commands all men everywhere to repent."

Finally, while we prescribe no man's course of action, we earnestly implore all to put forth their full energy, and in the most efficient modes, to show decidedly their sympathy with the Slave and their abhorrence of the system of oppression of which he is made the victim.

We implore our brethren at the South, especially those who hold the same faith as ourselves, to show their faith by their works; to come out from all participation in this sin, and, in the way they deem best, "to undo the heavy burden and let the oppressed go free."

We implore our brethren at the North, who may go to reside in Slaveholding regions, to go determined to make every sacrifice of profit or convenience rather than become abettors of this inhuman institution.

We implore all Christians and Christian preachers to unite in unceasing prayer to God for aid against this system, to lose no opportunity of speaking the truth and spreading light on this subject, in faith that the truth is strong enough to break every yoke. We pray them to remember those whose hearts were in this cause, who have ascended on high. If Channing, Follen, Worcester and Ware are still mindful of what is passing below, they must be looking to us to take their places and do their work. Wherefore seeing we are compassed by such witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and do the work of him who sent us while it is day.

And we, on our part, do hereby pledge ourselves before God and our brethren, never to be weary of laboring in the cause of human rights and freedom till Slavery be abolished and every Slave made free.

My dear Mary, I am sorry that the first passage you object to was inserted in the Protest. No other person has objected to it & I thought that your objection was to the part which I struck out. None of the Committee except yourself understood it implying that nothing more was to be done. With regard to the 5th paragraph, I did not wholly like it, but it has not been before objection too. It is moreover taken verbatim from Samuel J. May's outline of a Protest sent to the Committee & we all thought that he might be considered safe on that side - not likely to err in making too much allowance for slaveholders. It is not in my opinion necessary, inasmuch as all due allowance for their blindness &c. shall have been made in the 3^d paragraph. You will observe that I have made a great many alterations, all to make the document stronger & clearer. Clarke left it discretionary with me to do so in unimportant matters. The form of the Protest is his, the substance is from Mary. The printed copy has been sent to all as far as I know. It is now the property of those who adopt it by consenting to the use of their names. Is it right for me to make any more alterations? I wish you would answer this question soon & I will propose it to such other members of the Committee as I can before the document is published. I thank you for

your suggestions on this matter & is that of publishing, I have
been considering whether it would not be well to publish a
large edition in a pamphlet form & send giving it all
possible circulation through the public journals.

Upon second thought, I wish you would in your answer
write exactly ~~the~~ form of amendments which you would
desire, if you think we are competent to make any.
Remember however that something is always gained by conceding
as much as truth will allow to an opponent. It shows that we
understand his point of view.

All those - about forty - from whom I have heard speak in
the highest terms of the protest, Edward Hall objects to what is said about the
Bill be - but gives his opinion. What do you think of that? I don't
know much whether a document could be drawn up, which would be
of use to the cause, & yet liable to less objection. You must not think
of withholding your name.

Yours, very truly Robert L.